

The second proposal, on the other hand, would seem to address the concerns of subscribers with valuable vanity numbers in that it would clarify confusion among callers caused by the similarity of the numbers. The proposal is not perfect, however, in that it would reduce the value of both numbers by introducing delay between the time a caller dials the number and the time the caller reaches the desired party. Moreover, the gateway proposal would require use of technology capable of providing the service and it could interfere with the portability of toll free numbers – a result which would clearly be undesirable and contrary to established Commission policy. Finally, the proposal would entail additional costs, which would have to be borne by the parties whose similar numbers created the need for the gateway. In short, the gateway proposal is not the best solution to the problem.

The third proposal, partitioning, would seem to be discriminatory and could still result in parties receiving calls (for which they would have to pay) from confused callers who believed they were calling a business with the same toll free number, albeit with a different service access code. Use of a transitional gateway in combination with partitioning should reduce the unwanted charges that the subsequent subscriber would have to pay for wrong numbers, but might prove undesirable to the original business subscriber because of the delay it would introduce, as discussed above.

E. Toll Free Directory Assistance Should Be Open to Competition.

As TRA stated earlier, its primary concern in submitting these comments is that competition in toll free service should be preserved and promoted. AT&T currently is the

only provider of 800 directory assistance service.^{29/} TRA believes that directory assistance for all toll free numbers should be combined and opened to competition. Until this issue is resolved, and the implementational details of opening the service to competition are considered and clarified, the number for 888 directory assistance (1-888-555-1212) should not be assigned.

F. The Service Management System Should Be Administered by a Neutral Party.

The current administrator of the 800/SMS database is Database Services Management, Inc., a subsidiary of Bellcore, which subcontracts management of the Number Administration and Service Center to Lockheed IMS.^{30/} Database hardware is provided by Southwestern Bell.^{31/} Although the Regional Bell Operating Companies ("RBOCs"), which presently own Bellcore, are apparently planning to sell it,^{32/} the Commission should ensure that the future administrator of the SMS database is an entirely neutral party, unaffiliated with Bellcore, the RBOCs, any LEC, or any owner of a regional database used in the administration and operation of the database system. Absent complete neutrality, the risk exists that the administrator will accord preferential treatment to the RespOrgs or carriers with which it is affiliated, and any such treatment would be anathema to the growth of competition in toll free service which the Commission should encourage in this proceeding.

^{29/} NPRM at ¶ 48.

^{30/} NPRM at ¶ 6.

^{31/} *Id.*

^{32/} NPRM at ¶ 49.

G. Local Exchange Carriers Should Be Required to File Tariff Revisions to Implement New Toll Free Codes on at Least 45 Days' Notice.

The Commission has sought comment on certain aspects of tariffing the new 888 code.^{33/} The Commission should adopt its tentative conclusion that 888 numbers should be treated for tariffing purposes in the same manner as 800 numbers presently are treated. To the extent that the LECs deem it necessary to charge interim rates or file other tariff provisions to deal with transition issues and recover the costs associated therewith, any such charges and practices should be tariffed on not less than 45 days' notice, as the Commission has proposed.^{34/}

III.

CONCLUSION

TRA applauds the Commission's comprehensive examination of the issues surrounding implementation of the new 888 service access code and subsequent toll free access codes. It reiterates its belief that the most sound policy in this regard will be the policy that most promotes competition in toll free service and the wide availability to all parties, regardless of size or affiliation, of toll free numbers. The foregoing proposals, if

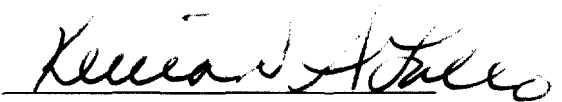
^{33/} NPRM at ¶ 56.

^{34/} NPRM at ¶ 57.

adopted by the Commission, should advance those goals without entailing onerous administrative burdens or costs.

Respectfully submitted,

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